

REMARKS FOR ADMINISTRATOR BOLDEN

CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL EVENT

Nov. 16, 2011

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Reid, Mr. McConnell, Mrs. Pelosi, Members of Congress and honored guests.

As we embark upon the next great chapter of human space exploration, we stand on the shoulders of the extraordinary men we recognize today. Those of us who have had the privilege to fly in space followed the trail they forged.

America's leadership in space and the confidence that we can go farther into the unknown and achieve great things as a people rests on the achievements of these brave men.

When, 50 years ago this year, President Kennedy challenged the nation to reach the moon, to "take longer strides" toward a "great new American enterprise," these men were the human face of those words. From Mercury and Gemini, on through our landings on the Moon in the Apollo Program, their actions unfolded the will of a nation for the greater achievement of humankind.

Today, another young President has challenged us to reach for new heights and plan an ambitious mission to Mars. Just as we called on the four individuals we honor today to carry out our early achievements in space, we now call on a new generation of explorers to go where we have never gone before.

As we honor these heroes, I want to recognize the hundreds of thousands of dedicated NASA employees and industry partners who contributed to the incredible success of the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programs and all that has followed, and all that is yet to come.

I also want to thank our Congress. Our nation is a better place because of more than a half century of strong, bipartisan support for NASA's work in human exploration, science and aeronautics.

Five members of the most recent Astronaut Candidate Class are with us today to pay tribute to the Congressional Gold Medal honorees, and build on their accomplishments to make similar, lasting contributions to our nation's space program.

This new group of astronauts will redefine space exploration in the years to come and continue to honor the legacy of John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins.

It is a lasting legacy – a legacy that continues to unfold and transform our modern world.

The inspiration these four have provided to generations isn't something we can measure, but we can feel it in our hearts. As a nation, we would not be the same without them and their bravery, their sense of duty and dedication to public service and their great skill at thinking on their feet.

They changed the course of history and helped our nation to achieve the bigger things to which our greater nature aspires. We owe them our humblest gratitude.

On behalf of NASA and all the astronauts past and present, I congratulate and thank each of you – John, Neil, Buzz, and Mike, our Congressional Gold Medal recipients.